



Have a Difficult Conversation

Tired of your roommate leaving dirty dishes around?

Don't know how to address your roommate's partner living at your place rent-free?

Frustrated by your friend ignoring you whenever "that other friend" comes around?

Upset when your partner cancels plans with you AGAIN?

Before the conversation...

Have an attitude of curiosity—Even though you are upset, try to approach the conversation with an attitude of openness and curiosity to learn more about the other person's point of view.

Think about your interests—Why does this matter to you? What do you want? If you can't have what you want, what else would work for you?

It takes two—Keep in mind that the other person has his/her own interests and motivations. Just as you feel that you are "right" in a situation, so may the other person, or they may be unaware you're even upset.

Consider timing—Think of a time that will work for the **both** of you. Ask the other person, "Is now a good time to talk?" before starting the conversation.

Have the conversation in person, not through texting or over the phone, whenever possible.

During the conversation...

Show you're paying attention by putting your cell phone away, turning to face the other person, and making eye contact. Uncross your arms and legs.

Use "I" Statements instead of saying "you make me..." This helps you to take responsibility for your feelings and avoid blaming the other person (e.g. "I feel upset when you leave the dishes in the sink").

Use facts, instead of your interpretation, to help communicate what you observed without adding judgment (e.g. "I see your dishes have been in the sink for four days").

State your concern clearly, instead of expecting the other person to read your mind.

Ask the other person for their input instead of assuming you know how they feel or what they think.

Listen without interrupting to what the other person says, even if you don't agree.

Look out for...



Escalating emotions—If the conversation is getting emotional, ask for a "time out." It is better to take a few minutes to breathe and cool down than to say something hurtful.



Reacting—Yelling, blaming, rolling your eyes, or using words like "always" or "never" can lead the other person to be defensive or shut down a conversation.



Getting stuck—Avoid getting stuck, and be open to compromise. You may get some of what you want, while the other person gets some of what he/she wants.

After the conversation...

Having a difficult conversation is...difficult! Give yourself some credit for having the courage to talk about the issue. If it didn't go as well as you would've liked, reflect on what you can change for next time.

The Ombuds Office can help you prepare for having a difficult conversation, or help you if you're dissatisfied after the conversation.

Call us at (805) 893-3285 to schedule an appointment.